

Welcome to the 15th edition of Workforce News, the newsletter of the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit.

Focus on research and knowledge management

In this issue, contributors focus on recent re-tendering research and knowledge management in the social services.

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Re-tendering and the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce

Dr Ian Cunningham, from the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of Strathclyde, discusses the outcomes of some joint research with the Workforce Unit that has sought to gain insights into the impact of re-tendering in the voluntary sector.

Qualitative research was undertaken involving face-to-face interviews with senior management, line managers and front-line staff in three voluntary organisations.

The organisations were chosen on the basis of their recent participation in re-tendering exercises.

The report raises a number of concerns regarding employment conditions and service quality within voluntary organisations, and provides early insights for policy-makers, employers and trade unions within the Scottish voluntary sector as the implications of the phenomenon of re-tendering emerge.

The report's key findings highlight how re-tendering has significant implications for those organisations involved, both winners and losers:

- An intensification of competitive pressures in the sector;
- Increased resources being put into re-tendering exercises to the detriment of the development of services;
- Evidence of a breakdown in previously co-operative relationships between voluntary sector providers;

- Concerns for service quality;
- Tensions emerging over the interpretation of TUPE regulations;
- The loss of experienced and highly motivated staff; and
- Evidence of continued undermining of terms and conditions of employment for the voluntary sector workforce.

Indeed, in the latter case, there are concerns that some organisations in the sector are going 'as low as they can go' in order to remain competitive.

Interviews with employees revealed that there is a highly committed and motivated workforce within the sector, willing to undertake a range of additional responsibilities above their contracted obligations, such as working without a break, working additional hours without pay, and/or taking on additional shifts.

At the same time, the re-tendering process has had implications for this high level of commitment and morale, with the majority of the workers revealing a profound sense of shock, disappointment and dismay at news that their services were being put out to tender.

Employees expressed concerns about their own job security and the future of service users. These concerns led to a minority considering leaving even before the result of the re-tender was heard. This was not helped by initially inconsistent information from management regarding employee rights under TUPE, and the future of service users.

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Developing a social service knowledge management strategy

The Managed Knowledge Network and the Social Services Knowledge Scotland portal

Susan Lindner
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The Scottish Government is funding development of a knowledge management strategy for social services, to underpin the goals of Changing Lives.

A Managed Knowledge Network (MKN) has been established to support the development and implementation of a knowledge management strategy for social services and further development of the Social Services Knowledge Scotland (SSKS) online knowledge service (www.sks.org.uk).

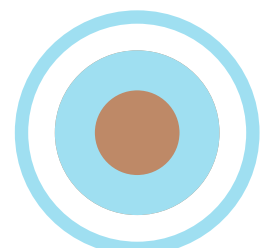
The aim is to achieve mutual benefit for organisations participating in the Managed Knowledge Network through shared ownership and responsibility. The MKN will recognise and build on existing foundations for information and knowledge management in organisations. It will achieve synergies and continuous improvement through a coordinated approach embedded in a national strategic workplan, implementing standards, delivering education in knowledge management, and sharing information through technology.

A steering group, with representation from a wide range of key social services organisations, will oversee the development of the MKN including:

- Further development of the knowledge management strategy for social services;
- Implementation of a workplan arising from the strategy, articulating the benefits for each organisation;
- Agreeing the contribution to the MKN from each organisation and the relationship with the organisation's own objectives;
- Developing business cases for funding for new knowledge services developments;
- Promotion of the Social Services Knowledge Scotland online service, ensuring it is embedded in each organisation as a 'hub' for information provision and knowledge support;
- Establishment of common standards for knowledge management across the MKN; and
- Delivery of knowledge management education and training.

Consultations have already begun with the social services sector, with an online survey and a one-day consultation and consensus building event. A user group is also being formed to gather views on how to develop the SSKS. This online knowledge service will play a key role in delivering the aims of the knowledge management strategy. User group members are being recruited from across the sector. If you would like to join, please complete the membership form which can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/SSKS-website>.

If you would like further information on any of these developments, please contact Susan Lindner by email at susan.lindner@nes.scot.nhs.uk or telephone 0141 352 2909.



Sharing practice - what are other people doing?

Choosing an SVQ Provider - New guidance from the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit

With final dates for registration of many categories of social services workers about to be announced, organisations will need to ensure that they have robust plans in place to get their staff qualified for registration. Many organisations will use Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) to do this. Choosing an SVQ provider can be a minefield for organisations that need to find a competent provider for SVQ awards.

At the Workforce Unit we have produced guidance with the collaboration of stakeholders who have been through the process of selecting an SVQ provider or who have a quality assurance role.

We hope the guidance will go some way towards making the search for a high quality provider of SVQs an easier and more satisfactory process. The guidance begins by explaining some of the often confusing terminology that surrounds SVQs, goes on to look at factors organisations may wish to consider before engaging a provider and finally presents a checklist for deciding whether a provider is likely to give a quality service.

We do not guarantee that if you use the guidance you will have wonderful provision, but it should assist in the decision-making process.

Finally, beware of providers who offer short completion times and very low charges for candidates; they may look as if they are a bargain but may not give the quality that service users have a right to expect from the workers who help them to meet their needs.

If you would like us to send you a hard copy of the guidance, please email Linda Hamilton at vswu.admin@ccpscotland.org or telephone 01786 849752.

You can also download a copy of the guidance from the Workforce Unit website at www.ccpscotland.org/workforceunit



Advocacy - the voluntary sector voice

Judith Midgley reports from the first meeting of the new National Workforce Group for Social Services.

With the successful launch of the Continuous Learning Framework, the work of the Changing Lives Workforce Group came to an end in December.

The newly constituted National Workforce Group for Social Services met for the first time in February.

Membership of the Group has been widened greatly and now includes colleagues from health, education, colleges, the Scottish Funding Council, the Social Work Inspection Agency, the Joint Improvement Team and Skills Development Scotland.

I am pleased to report I am no longer

the only voluntary sector 'voice' on the group, having been joined by Addie Stevenson, Chief Executive of Aberlour Child Care Trust and Depute Chair of Community Care Providers Scotland.

Discussions focussed on what the Group would do and how it would work. The Group aspires to champion workforce issues, and influence policy makers and practitioners through the quality of its work.

It intends to develop a work programme that will result in some tangible outputs. These will include high quality papers, models and focussed debates.

There is a desire to learn from the approach taken by other sectors to workforce planning and development.

The wider membership of the Group should allow it to develop a better understanding of the issues for different workforces and how they connect. It should enable it to develop shared solutions.

The Group plans to meet quarterly, with the next meeting taking place in June. The intention is that the next two meetings will develop the Group's model for working and address substantive issues in different parts of the workforce.

The energy at the February meeting was high and there was a clear commitment from those present to make the Group a place that matters to the development of the workforce.



Re-tendering and the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce (continued)

Among those employees who worked in services that were transferred, the news of the loss of contracts to a new employer was offset by a number of factors, including:

- Terms and conditions of employment being protected under TUPE;
- No significant changes to working practices;
- Continuity of service provided to their clients;
- The values and reputation of their new employer;
- Effective management and union interventions to smooth the transfer to their new employer; and
- A sense of resignation that they could not alter the outcome.

At the same time, there was anger among transferred staff regarding some managers having the option to stay with their initial employer, while front line staff were transferred.

There was also general anxiety for employees and service users who were transferred into private sector organisations, with particular concerns for employees regarding sustaining employment conditions and union recognition, and continuity of quality services for clients.

Among employees in organisations who successfully re-tendered, there was significant relief at the outcome.

Employees, however, expressed concerns over measures their employer introduced in terms of organisational restructuring to secure the services.

Employees, on the whole, whether they either were transferred to a new employer or continued to work in the successful organisations, remained largely committed to delivering the services to clients. There are, however, problems on the horizon for the sector if re-tendering becomes the norm.

Management in one organisation had already implemented significant changes to terms and conditions to secure competitiveness.

Management in the two other cases were considering a series of changes to terms and conditions and skill mixes within teams to respond to this new competitive environment.

The evidence from the case studies reveals obvious dangers for employee morale from such policies.

Individuals reported a large degree of discomfort about their future working conditions and services to clients if their employers had to continue to make cost savings to secure contracts during re-tenders.

The project also raised concerns regarding service user involvement in the process of re-tendering. In an era of personalisation of care packages, the research revealed very little consultation with service users and their families relating to levels of satisfaction with existing services and whether they felt the service should be re-tendered at all. Consultation and sharing information with service users by local authorities was also minimal during the process of re-tendering itself. In addition, respondents pointed out how, even when services were transferred, there was little if any change to the way they were delivered. This leads the report to question whether there are other ways for local authorities to secure the savings that they need that do not involve the turmoil evident from re-tendering.

Overall, if re-tendering is the future, the report raises concerns that such exercises could contribute to the erosion of employee morale within the sector that ultimately would have detrimental consequences for service quality.

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